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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006140

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/30/2008

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM PTER IZ TU

SUBJECT: KURDS IN SOUTHEAST FEAR U.S. CRACKDOWN ON PKK

REF: A. ANKARA 5745

¶B. ANKARA 4787

¶C. ANKARA 4499

Classified by Polcouns John Kunstadter; reasons 1.5 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Kurds in southeastern Turkey fear a possible U.S. military action against the PKK/KADEK in northern Iraq, and oppose Turkish participation in the Stabilization Force because they believe Turkish authorities would use their presence in Iraq to crack down on Iraqi Kurds. Most of our contacts denounce recent PKK/KADEK violence, but say people in the region have close family ties to the organization's members. Our Kurdish contacts uniformly argue that the GOT should offer a general amnesty to all PKK/KADEK militants and say U.S. military action against the PKK/KADEK could cause an anti-U.S. backlash in the southeast. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Embassy Human Rights Officer and EUR/SE Desk Officer traveled to Diyarbakir, Batman, Sirnak, and Mardin provinces September 23-26 and met with human rights activists, security officials, mayors, governors, attorneys, doctors, and religious leaders. Adana PO also participated in portions of the visit as part of a longer orientation tour. This report is based on these meetings.

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PKK "Our Sons"  
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¶3. (C) Our Kurdish contacts across the board expressed deep anxiety about the possibility of a U.S. military crackdown on PKK/KADEK militants in northern Iraq. Batman Mayor Huseyin Kalkan put it most bluntly, warning us that an attack on the PKK/KADEK would cost the U.S. its new-found support among Kurds. Most of our Kurdish contacts denounced recent PKK/KADEK attacks and claimed southeastern Kurds generally oppose armed PKK/KADEK activity. But they uniformly told us that people in the region feel a close affinity to the organization's members. "None of the families here are neutral," said Nezahat Dagtekin, director of ART Radio/TV in Diyarbakir. "We all have relatives with the PKK in the mountains." Sheikh Abdulbaki Hasimi of Cizre, a major political and religious figure in the southeast, was among those who warned us that people in the region will react harshly if PKK/KADEK leaders are killed. "They are our sons. They did not come from the moon," he said. Dagtekin said the reaction could become violent, though she declined to elaborate on what types of violence might be used or where it would be directed.

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Kurds Favor General Amnesty  
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¶4. (C) All of our Kurdish contacts rejected the GOT's Reintegration Law (reflets) as inadequate and called on the GOT to issue a general amnesty for PKK/KADEK militants. They argued that PKK/KADEK violence was a reaction to the anti-Kurdish policies of the Turkish State, and that organization members were therefore entitled to an amnesty, provided they lay down their arms. Attorney Fahrettin Karakoyunlu acknowledged that the continued presence of armed PKK/KADEK militants presents a threat to human rights reform and economic progress in the southeast. He said it is especially important for the Kurds that the U.S. resolve the problem. But, like others, he pleaded with us to pressure the GOT to offer a PKK/KADEK amnesty. "We recognize that Turkey is a U.S. ally, but so are the Kurds," Karakoyunlu asserted. It was clear to poloffs that many Kurds believe the U.S. can force the GOT to agree to a PKK/KADEK amnesty.

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Embassy: We Support Kurdish Rights, Not Terrorism

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15. (C) We replied that the U.S. will continue to support Kurdish language and cultural rights, in the context of equal rights for all Turkish citizens. We will continue to press Turkey, as an ally, to enact and implement human rights reform. But the U.S. considers the PKK/KADEK a terrorist organization and cannot accept its presence in northern Iraq. Of all the countries with large Kurdish populations, Turkey is the only democracy. The GOT is engaged in an intense EU-related reform process that holds the prospect of a new relationship between the State and the Kurdish community. Turkey is the country that has the best chance of solving its Kurdish problem through peaceful, democratic means. Any attempt to achieve these goals through violence will squander this opportunity.

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GOT Officials: No Major Backlash  
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16. (C) The governors, prosecutors, and security directors with whom we spoke rejected the idea that Kurds in the southeast would react violently to a crackdown on the PKK/KADEK. Batman Security Director Tahir Bayindir claimed that most people in the southeast do not support the terrorist organization. Bayindir predicted that the pro-Kurdish Democratic People's Party (DEHAP) would stage some protests, but without great effect. Saban Erturk, chief prosecutor of the Diyarbakir State Security Court, agreed, averring that "people who tell you otherwise are not to be trusted -- they are trying to convince you not to act" against the PKK/KADEK.

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Kurds Oppose Turkish Troops in Iraq  
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17. (C) Southeastern Kurds are also concerned about possible Turkish participation in the Stabilization Force in Iraq. They particularly reject the idea of Turkish troops in northern Iraq, but fear that even a deployment through northern Iraq to non-Kurdish regions could lead to Turkish-Kurdish clashes in Iraq and a crackdown in southeast Turkey. Kalkan accused the Turkish State of organizing attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq, arguing that such attacks were designed to convince Washington of the need to bring Turkish troops into the Stabilization Force. "You must not let the Turkish military trick you into letting them into northern Iraq," he said.

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Comment  
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18. (C) In the run-up to the Iraq war, Turkish Kurds opposed the action, but for different reasons than critics elsewhere -- they feared a crackdown by the Turkish military. When the U.S.-led coalition toppled the Iraqi regime without bringing Turkish troops into northern Iraq, many Kurdish leaders were ecstatic. A number of them told us they were pleased with their "new U.S. alliance," and let us know they expected to benefit from a U.S.-led makeover of the Middle East. While we have consistently warned against such unrealistic expectations, the Kurdish public, desperate for solutions, clings to its hopes. A U.S. attack on the PKK/KADEK will challenge these hopes and expectations, and some of our interlocutors hinted that such a military solution could spark anti-U.S. sentiment in the southeast.

19. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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